

BOARD OF REGISTERED NURSING

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STUDENT WORKERS

A student nurse worker may not perform nursing functions beyond the level of a nursing assistant unless enrolled in a BRN approved student-worker course developed through collaboration of a Board approved nursing program and the health care facility employing the student.

In order to determine which functions such student workers and other nursing assistants may perform, first consider the following definition from the Nursing Practice Act:

The practice of nursing means those functions, including basic health care, which

- (1) help people cope with difficulties in daily living,
- (2) are associated with their actual or potential health or illness problems or the treatment thereof,
- (3) require a substantial amount of scientific knowledge or technical skill.

As a general operating principle, basic health care functions which possess the first two characteristics may be performed by nursing assistants; functions which possess the third characteristic may not be performed by nursing assistants.

A few examples of functions possessing the third characteristic, i.e., require a substantial amount of scientific knowledge or technical skill, are nasogastric and gastrostomy feedings, tracheostomy care, catheterization, regulation of intravenous infusions and administration of drugs.

Although the mechanics of performing such procedures may be taught quite easily, the ability to assess the patient before and throughout the procedure and to respond appropriately to the patient's reactions derives from additional substantial scientific knowledge and technical skill, and for these reasons are excluded from the practice of unlicensed nurses.

The Attorney General, recently asked if certified nursing assistants can lawfully perform nasogastric or gastrostomy feeding, concluded that they may not. This conclusion was based on a review of the steps for performing the procedures and consideration of the potential for complications, such as the introduction of fluid into the patient's lungs with consequent patient harm. Nursing management may use this same process to make a determination regarding the suitability of assigning a function to a non-nurse.

Nursing management should be aware that the BRN

- holds nursing management responsible for making nursing assignments in accord with the Nursing Practice Act;
- investigates all reports/complaints of unlicensed nursing activity; and
- when evidence supports charges that a registered nurse has assigned a nursing assistant to perform registered nursing functions, takes appropriate disciplinary action against the responsible registered nurse.